

RELIGIOUS DUTIES,

CONSISTING CHIEFLY OF

EXTRACTS

FROM

THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.



PHILADELPHIA :

PUBLISHED BY THE TRACT ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS,
AND TO BE HAD AT THEIR DEPOSITORY,
No. 84, MULBERRY STREET.

.....

RELIGIOUS DUTIES.

CHAP. I.

On Faith and Hope in God.

THE first duty which we owe to the Divine Being, is Faith ; or, a belief in the existence of God, in his power, and in his goodness. It is called Faith, because these great and important truths do not admit of that kind of demonstration by which many other truths may be proved ; and yet all around us, and all within us, so fully evince the existence, the power, and the goodness, of a Divine Being, that this may be considered a just and reasonable duty. On a subject so much above our comprehension, we must be content in some degree, to walk by faith, and not by sight. We need not, therefore, stumble at this first principle of religion, to which our implicit acquiescence is required. "Without faith it is impossible to please God ; for he that cometh unto him, must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of all those that diligently seek him." When these principles have their proper influence on the heart, they are of great service to us in our passage through life ; and tend greatly to reconcile our minds to those various circumstances, which are by an all-wise Providence, permitted or dispensed to us. It is by the eye of faith that we see Him, who is, to every other eye, invisible ; and by this eye of faith we are enabled to look beyond the things which are seen, and are temporal, to those things which are not seen, and are eternal. It was under the influence of this faith, that "Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin ; seeing him who is invisible, and having an eye to the recompense of reward."

From faith in the Divine Being and Providence proceeds that "Hope which is an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast." In the storms and tempests attendant on this probationary state of existence, an humble hope and trust in the mercies and providence of God, are essentially necessary to the preservation of the vessel, from being driven on the rocks or quicksands which surround our coast ; and on which shipwreck is sometimes made of every thing that renders life valuable, or eternity desirable.

This hope or trust may be divided into two parts ; first, as it relates to the providence of God, in reference to the things of this life ; and secondly, as it relates to his mercy in respect to those things which pertain to that life which is to come. With respect to the first, our blessed Lord strengthens his disciples in their confidence in the Divine Providence, by many apt allusions and pressing exhortations : "I say unto you, take no thought, or rather, be not anxious, for your life, what ye shall

eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Behold the fowls of the air ; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Consider the lilies how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith ? Therefore seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you." We have in the prophet Habakkuk an eminent instance of resignation to Divine protection, and of confidence therein. After foreseeing some impending calamities, he expresses himself in this animated and animating language : " Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls ; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

It sometimes happens that religiously disposed minds fall into a state of depression and discouragement, respecting their inward or their future state. This, so far as it excites vigilance and exertion, may be beneficial ; but when its tendency is to lead to despair of the mercies of God, and to cast away our confidence in his goodness and loving kindness, it becomes a disposition to which we ought not to give way, but should carefully guard against its attacks. This situation of mind is strongly described by the Psalmist in the seventy-seventh Psalm ; " In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord : my* hand was stretched out in the night and ceased not : my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Will the Lord cast off forever ; will he be favourable no more ? Is his mercy clean gone for ever ? doth his promise fail for evermore ? hath God forgotten to be gracious ? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies ?" Here the Psalmist seems to recollect his own peculiar weakness, and turns his reflections another way. " I said, this is my infirmity ; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord ; surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy works, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God ! is in the sanctuary ; who is so great a God as our God ?" In another Psalm, we find the pious David consoling himself in this encouraging soliloquy : " Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God ; for I shall yet praise

* See the marginal reading.

him who is the health of my countenance, and my God." Here we see the benefit of attending to that apostolic exhortation: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward."

The following passages point out the necessity and advantages of a proper trust or confidence in God, on all occasions: "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. Commit thy way unto him, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. Judgment is before him, therefore trust thou in him."

CHAP. II.

On the Love of God.

When we consider the attributes which are ascribed to the Divine Being, and the relation in which we stand to him, nothing can be more reasonable, nothing more becoming that relation, than the tribute of love: it is a disposition of mind which we ought peculiarly to cultivate, as being in an especial manner, connected both with our duty and happiness. When this feeling predominates in the mind, those religious restraints which are aptly described by "the yoke of Christ" become easy, and his burden is made light. The ways of righteousness come to be "ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace."

When our Saviour was insidiously asked; "which is the great commandment of the law?" the reply was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." Did we place this duty sufficiently before us, as the most desirable object of our attainment, and frequently examine ourselves respecting it; considering at the same time the many reasonable motives which we have for fulfilling it; we should be likely to witness an increase of this love in our hearts, and feelingly to unite with the expressions of Holy Writ: "I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold. Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it. Oh! love the Lord, all ye saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Let them that love thy name be joyful in thee, for thou, Lord! wilt bless the righteous. Let such as love thy salvation say continually, The Lord be magnified. The Lord preserveth all them that love him."

But of all the inducements to the love of God, there is none so powerful as that which the apostle mentions: "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ

died for us." In the enjoyment of this consoling faith, Christians can say, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Such was the prevalence and the establishment of this love in the heart of the apostle, and some of his fellow-believers, that he could confidently declare: "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The principal proof of our love, arises from our obedience to what we know to be the Divine will concerning us; or his commandments, to us. "If ye love me," says our Saviour, "keep my commandments." Consistent with this language, is that of the apostle John: "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous."

In order to guard us against the loss of that love, which is so important a part of our duty, the following advices and cautions are given; "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth; love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him: for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are not of the Father, but of the world. The world passeth away and the lust thereof: whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God, for the friendship of the world, is enmity with God." Let not these interesting cautions and observations be forgotten; and then the following salutations of the apostle may be verified in our experience: "The Lord direct your hearts unto the love of God, and unto the patient waiting for Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

CHAP. III.

On the Fear of God.

The next duty which we owe to the Divine Being, and which may probably be considered by many as previous to that of love, is the fear of offending Him. This has been, in all ages, the disposition of the righteous, by which they have been in a great measure, preserved from falling into those irreligious and immoral practices, which draw down Divine displeasure on men. When we consider the Omnipotence, the Omniscience, and the Justice of God, we shall find abundant cause for cherishing this Fear, accompanied with an awful reverence of spirit towards him. So forcibly was this duty impressed on the mind of one of the Patriarchs, that the Divine Being was styled, "The Fear

of Isaac." Joseph was an eminent example of the beneficial effects of this fear. He says of himself, "I fear God;" and he gave a striking proof of it, when, under a peculiar temptation, he resisted it with this memorable language, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

When we attend to all the beneficial consequences which are described in Scripture, as the result of this virtue, its importance must forcibly impress our minds, and should stimulate us to the attainment of it. "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God," was a precept early given to the Jewish nation, and was added to many of their legal institutions, as an incentive to duty. In the book of Job, we have a grand description of the inestimable value of true wisdom; which is, after all that is said of it, reduced to this simple, but important point: "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, is understanding." Solomon concludes his no less fine description of wisdom in similar words. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding." In this description of wisdom, he also says: "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth do I hate." Again, "By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil. It is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. By humility, and the fear of the Lord, are riches, and honour, and life."

The Psalmist inculcates the Divine fear, in this inviting language: "Come, ye Children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." We have many other incitements to this duty in the Scriptures; particularly in the Psalms: "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. He is to be feared above all gods. Thou, even thou, O God of Jacob! art to be feared; and who may stand in thy sight, when once thou art angry? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. Stand in awe, and sin not. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Let all the earth fear the Lord. Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble. He sitteth between the Cherubim, let the earth be moved. Who would not fear thee, O King of Nations! for to thee doth it appertain."

But in the Holy Scriptures, Christians are taught whom they

should not fear, as well as whom they should fear. "Ye shall not fear other gods. Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of Heaven; for the customs of the people are vain. The fear of man bringeth a snare. Fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of a man **which** shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the Heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?"

Our blessed Redeemer gave his disciples some particular instructions on this subject; "I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him."

Thus we find in every dispensation the fear of God was a necessary attainment. It formed a prominent part in that message delivered by the angel, who was seen to fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth; saying with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgments is come; and worship Him that made heaven and earth; and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

CHAP. IV.

On Religious Meditation.

By Religious Meditation, is meant that inward retirement of mind, from the cares and concerns of this world, in which we may contemplate the works of God, both in creation and redemption; and consider the duties which we owe to him, and one to another.

To have the mind frequently engaged in this manner, is of no small importance to the religious improvement of a Christian. For this purpose, as well as for that of inward retirement and private prayer, some persons set apart particular times of the day; whilst others find it practicable when they are engaged in their outward employments, inwardly to retire from the world's concerns, secretly to meditate upon the law of the Lord, to wait upon him for the renewal of their spiritual strength, and to pour out their supplications unto him. To prescribe the mode of performing these duties, is not my business; and indeed it is a point in which we cannot well prescribe one for another. That they are duties, important and beneficial, will, no doubt, be generally admitted: and we have reason to believe, that they have

been practised by the righteous of all generations. We are told that Enoch walked with God ; and we may reasonably suppose, that this was by secret communion with him, and meditation upon his works and commands.

Of religious meditation, we have an example in the case of Isaac ; and from the incidental mention of his "going into the field at eventide to meditate," a presumptive proof, at least, is afforded, that a similar practice was not uncommon with the Patriarchs. To Joshua, the successful leader of the children of Israel into the promised land, this command was given : "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein ; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." We have but little left on record in the Scriptures, of the private, religious exercises of those concerning whom they are written, previously to the Book of Psalms. Here we find in the first Psalm, religious meditation represented as a material part of the employment of the man who is styled blessed. "His delight, says the Psalmist, is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night." It was, no doubt, to this duty, that the Psalmist alluded, when he gave this exhortation : "Commune with your own heart upon your bed ; and be still." The benefits which result from religious meditation are thus described "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches." Again we find this employment excellently and profitably illustrated, and its benefits under close conflicts strongly described : "I have considered the days of old ; the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night, and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever, and will he be favourable no more ?" After various considerations of this kind, the Psalmist concludes in this manner : "Surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary : Who is so great a God as our God ?"

But the inspired writers did not confine their meditation to the law of their God, or to his providential dealings with his people. They saw him, and they adored him, in the works of creation. From these they drew many beautiful similes, and inculcated much important and humbling instruction. "The Heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." Again, "When I consider thy

heavens the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, I exclaim, What is man that thou art mindful of him ; or the son of man, that thou visitest him !”

Our duties also afford very copious subjects for our meditation. Thus the apostle Paul enumerates many particulars of a very comprehensive nature, and recommends them to the contemplation of his favourite Philippians : “ Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.” To this exhortation he adds these memorable words : “ Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do ; and the God of peace shall be with you.”

CHAP. V.

Watchfulness and Waiting upon God.

These duties are intimately connected with each other. Watchfulness is an exercise of the mind, in which we are concerned to guard against the approach and attack of evil, on the one hand ; and on the other to be looking for, and ready to receive the communication of Divine good to the soul. The last may be termed, waiting upon God. This expression may also be applied to a dependence on the Divine care and bounty, for the supply of our spiritual and temporal wants ; and patiently waiting the Lord’s time for this supply.

When we consider how we are surrounded in this world by temptations to evil ; how much our own propensities incline us to comply with it ; and that, in addition to these inducements there is also an unwearied enemy and evil spirit, who is seeking our destruction ; watchfulness will appear to be an indispensable duty. The world, the flesh, and the devil, are all represented in Holy Writ as enemies, against which it is necessary to be upon our guard. “ The world lieth in wickedness, and its friendship is enmity with God. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit ;” and so powerful is that enemy, who has these weapons to war with against our happiness, that an apostle formerly gave this important exhortation to the early believers : “ Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.” When these considerations have taken place in our minds, we shall be convinced of the propriety of that universal command given by our blessed Saviour : “ What I say unto you, I say unto all ; watch.” Again, “ Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.” Thus also the apostles : “ Watch ye, stand fast in the faith ; quit you like men, be strong.

I let us watch and be sober. Be ye sober, and watch unto prayer."

The truly humble-minded Christian, is frequently brought to feel his own incapacity for every good word and work. He is often made sensible of that important truth inculcated by his Divine Master: "No man can come unto me, except the Father which sent me, draw him." From this sense and feeling, he finds the necessity of patiently waiting upon God for health and strength in the performance of his religious duties. The benefit of this state of mind, is frequently described in Holy Writ, and its duty strongly enforced: "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thy heart; wait, I say, on the Lord." Again, "I waited patiently on the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay; and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; and he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God. Many shall see it and fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Thus does the royal Psalmist describe the beneficial consequences of waiting upon God, and Solomon represents wisdom, no doubt the wisdom which is from above, speaking in this manner: "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors."

The prophet Habakkuk appears to have been sensible of the importance of this duty, both for his own particular benefit, and for the fulfilment of his prophetic office: "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see, what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." In this state of mind he received the Divine communication and commission, to "write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." Thus also we find the apostles were commanded by their Heavenly Master, previously to their entering on their apostolical office, "to wait at Jerusalem for the promise of the Father; which," saith he, "ye have heard of me."

I shall conclude this subject with the lively description given by the evangelical prophet, of the benefits arising from this exercise of mind: "Even the youths shall faint and grow weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."

CHAP. VI.

On Prayer.

Of all the duties which Religion requires, there is not one more clearly obligatory, or more interestingly important, than

that of Prayer ; by which it is scarcely necessary to say, is meant, the making our requests known to God, for those things of which we stand in need, whether temporal or spiritual. This is a duty which we may be said to owe to ourselves as well as to God. When we consider our manifold wants, our infirmities, and our dangers, with our incapacity to supply or relieve ourselves ; and when we reflect, that the Divine Being alone is capable of affording us that supply and assistance, which are necessary for our present and future well-being ; the importance of this duty to ourselves, or for our own benefit must be obvious. Again, when we consider, that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift ; that the earth is his, and the fulness thereof ; that in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ; these considerations show, that prayer is a duty which we owe to his omnipotence and goodness : but in addition to these reasonable considerations, the commands which are given us in the Holy Scriptures, impose prayer upon us, as being indispensably due to the Almighty. We have various precepts and examples, respecting this duty, in the Old Testament ; all tending to incite us to " lift up our hearts with our hands to God in the Heavens : " but in the New Testament the directions are more full and particular. Our blessed Lord inculcated this duty very forcibly among his disciples : and we are told, " that he spake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." The apostle Paul is very earnest in his injunctions on this head : " Be careful, or anxious, for nothing ; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving. Pray without ceasing. I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting ; that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men ; for kings and for those that are in authority ; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty ; for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Saviour."

But there are some circumstances necessary to be attended to, in order to make our prayers acceptable, and such as will be likely to procure a favourable answer to them. The first of these is, sincerity of heart, in the abhorrence of sin, and in desires after holiness and purity. Of this the Psalmist appears to have been fully sensible, when he says, " If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Again, " I will wash my hands in innocency, so will I encompass thy altar, O God!" Solomon also makes a memorable observation on this subject : " He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination to the Lord." In another place

he says, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord : but the prayer of the upright is his delight." In the answer which the young man who had been blind, made to the cavilling Jews, we have an instructive remark on the qualification for true prayer : "We know that God heareth not sinners ; but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth." The apostle John also inculcates a similar doctrine : "Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God : and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."

The direction and caution which were given by our Saviour on this subject, should also be remembered, in order to avoid that ostentatious disposition which mars, in the sight of God, all our otherwise good words and works : "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are ; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet : and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, who is in secret ; and thy Father who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

Our Lord having thus cautioned his disciples against a desire to be seen and praised of men, proceeds to correct another false apprehension which some had entertained, that they should be heard for their much speaking. Of this notion he exposes the folly ; and, in order to exemplify the doctrine which he taught, he gives his disciples a most comprehensive, and at the same time concise, specimen of prayer.

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ; thy kingdom come : thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread ; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors ; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil ; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

On one part of this excellent prayer, our blessed Lord makes a short comment, to show the importance of a disposition of mind, which, through Divine grace, it is in our power, and is certainly our duty, to attain. "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you ; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Of how great importance is this duty of forgiveness ? and, may it not be added, how little is it attended to ?

Our approaches to the throne of Divine grace, ought also to be accompanied with a trust in the mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ ; to which he himself holds out this, and other encouraging promises : "Verily, verily. I say unto you, whatso-

ever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you." We are also directed to "ask in faith, nothing wavering."

There is another important requisite necessary to be attended to, in the performance of the solemn duty of prayer. This is, the assistance of the Holy Spirit; the necessity of which the apostle Paul clearly sets forth, when he says, "The spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for, as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered: and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the Saints according to the will of God." The same apostle, in another place, describes true prayer in this manner: "Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit; and watching thereunto with all perseverance."

But notwithstanding these requisites for the performance of true prayer, let not any be discouraged from an attention to this important duty from a sense of their own imperfections, or from an apprehension that their minds are not sufficiently under a superior influence to enter upon it. If we are sincerely desirous of being brought into a state of perfect acceptance with our Maker, we may approach him with an humble dependence on the Spirit and mediation of his Son, putting up our prayers unto him, and, "watching thereunto with all perseverance." Thus the penitent sinner will meet with that gracious acceptance which is mercifully held out to him, and the truth of the language of the Psalmist, will be verified in his experience: "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust."

Great is the importance of a due attention to the duty on which we are now treating, and to the various circumstances necessary for its acceptable performance. Of this the Psalmist appears to have been deeply sensible, when he preferred this petition to the Divine Being: "Let my prayer come up before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice." For want of a due attention to those circumstances, there is reason to fear, that many at this time may be subject to the same remark, which the apostle James makes concerning some in his day: "Ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not, ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss: that ye may consume it upon your lusts." On the other hand, we are told by the same apostle, that "the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." This, we have good reason to believe, is the

prayer which ascends like incense, before the throne of God and of the Lamb.

CHAP. VII.

On Thanksgiving and Praise.

Thanksgiving is an expression of our gratitude to the Divine Being for favours received. Praise may convey a sense of admiration, as well as of gratitude, and is applicable to the power and wisdom as well as to the goodness of God. Thus the Psalmist: "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

The reasonableness of these duties, and the obligations to perform them, are so self-evident to every considerate mind that believes in a Divine Being and Providence, that, if we had no injunctions to the practice of them, they would unavoidably become an almost involuntary effusion from every feeling heart. But it is to be regretted that, either from want of consideration, or from want of sensibility, there are among those who are surrounded with blessings on every hand, many who are inattentive to the favours which they enjoy, or ungrateful for them. Ingratitude to the Divine Being for temporal or spiritual blessings, is a sin which is peculiarly marked by his displeasure. Of this we have a strong proof in the instance of the Israelites, of whom, after recapitulating the peculiar favours by which they had been distinguished, it is said: "But Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked, then he forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, they sacrificed unto devils, and not to God. And when the Lord saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters."

Here we see the idolatry of the Jews described, as the consequence of their ingratitude for the blessings which were conferred upon them; and the apostle, in describing the depraved state of the heathen world, both in its religion and morality, traces it to the same source: "Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened: professing to be wise they became fools; and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man; and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." When we consider these lamentable

consequences, as the result of unthankfulness and ingratitude how important is the exhortation of the prophet Jeremiah "Give glory to the Lord your God before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness."

Numerous are the examples, as well as the exhortations, which are contained in the Holy Scriptures, and particularly in the book of Psalms, relating to this subject, from which it may be sufficient to extract the following: "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High; to show forth thy loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies. Oh! that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men."

The inspired writers of the New Testament likewise furnish us with many incitements to this duty. Christianity itself was introduced with, "Glory to God in the highest," as an acknowledgment previously necessary to the promotion of "peace on earth, and good will towards men." We find the mother of our Lord pouring out her soul, in a grateful song of praise, which begins with this pious language: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour—for he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name." The apostle Paul very pressingly inculcates an attention to these duties. "In every thing," says he, "give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit: speaking to yourselves in psalms, and in hymns, and in spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always, for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. By him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."

It is not, however, a formal performance of this duty that will meet with Divine approbation. It must, like prayer, be the product of an humbled and sanctified heart. When this is attained to, thankfulness and praise will frequently become involuntary effusions, and ascend with acceptance before Him who is the giver of every good and perfect gift; and, as this state of mind is continued in, qualification will finally be experienced to

join with that innumerable multitude, mentioned in the book of Revelations, who “ stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, saying, Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb ;” to which sacred anthem the whole Angelic Host, returned this responsive language: “ Amen. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour and power, and might, be unto our God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

CHAP. VIII.

On Public Worship, and the appropriation of one Day in the Week for this purpose.

The Public Worship of the Almighty is a special duty of all men, who have opportunity and ability for it. This results from the relation in which we all stand to God, as our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor. Common benefits demand united thanksgiving and praises. A social acknowledgment of these mercies and blessings, not only becomes us, as dependent beings, but is attended with various advantages. The rich and prosperous, when thus assembled with the poor and afflicted, and acknowledging their dependence on the same great Benefactor, may learn humility, and be led to sentiments of charity towards their fellow-creatures. The children of poverty and distress, whilst assembled with the opulent, and joining them in solemn worship, may feel that they are all the offspring of one gracious Parent; all equally dependent on his bounty and goodness; and from those feelings they may learn to support, with resignation and hope, that allotment which the Father of Mercies has assigned to them. In the one class, sentiments of pride and contempt for others, are likely to be suppressed; and in the other, envy, discontent, and murmuring are discouraged. Whatever differences may elsewhere exist among men, in the presence of the Divine Being “ the rich and the poor meet, equally, together: for the Lord is, equally, the maker of them all.”

The Holy Scriptures inform us, that this duty had been practised in all ages, by those who had been distinguished for piety and virtue. In early times the sacrifices of animals, or offerings of the fruits of the earth, were the most common mode of publicly acknowledging a dependence on the Divine Being, and were most probably of Divine institution; but when it pleased the Almighty to separate from the rest of mankind a people whom he distinguished by peculiar precepts and favours, it appears that in addition to those offerings, they met together for the performance of Divine worship: “ Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary; I am the Lord.” This precept

points out the institution of a time and place for public worship, and they were both religiously observed by the pious among the Jews; though there is reason to believe they were much neglected by many of another description.

The Psalmist, with that humble piety which peculiarly distinguishes his character, is an eminent instance of public, as well as private devotion: "As for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I worship towards thy Holy temple." Again, "We will go into his tabernacle; we will worship at his footstool." And in order that he may perform this service acceptably, he forms an excellent resolution: "I will wash my hands in innocency; so will I compass thy altar, O Lord! that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works." Nor was it merely as an obligation, that he performed this important duty: "His delight was in the law of the Lord;" and this made the performance of religious worship a grateful, not an irksome task. "Lord I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thy honour dwelleth. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of God,—for a day in thy courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness."

Although the Christian dispensation exempted its professors from the ceremonious part of the Jewish law, it did not by any means, exempt them from the duty of public worship. We have the examples of our Saviour and his apostles, in support of this practice. The apostle Paul is indeed very strenuous in inculcating it: "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service; and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, public worship is thus excellently illustrated and enforced: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus; by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a High Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith;—not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

The Christian religion has, however, freed its professors from being confined to particular places, for the performance of religious worship. Thus our Saviour taught his disciples: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them:" and in the memorable conversation which he held with the Samaritan woman, he showed that public wor-

ship was not to be confined to any particular place; for when she inquired of him whether Jerusalem, or the mountain of Samaria, was the true place of worship, he set them, and, by consequence, all other particular places aside, as being exclusively appropriated to this purpose. "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, exclusively, worship the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth." Here we see the fulfilling of the evangelical prophecy: "In every place, incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering."

Though no place is exclusively essential to the performance of public worship; yet some place is necessary for "the assembling of ourselves together;" and some time must be peculiarly appropriated to this purpose. Under the Jewish law, and most probably prior to that time, the seventh day of the week was set apart for this service: but when that dispensation was abrogated, the primitive Christians thought proper to alter the time from the seventh, to the first day of the week.—Although the ceremonial part of the Jewish sabbath is not obligatory upon Christians, yet several of the reasons assigned for its institution, apply to us equally with them. Christians in all ages have, therefore, agreed in the appropriation of a seventh day, or one day in the week, to be particularly set apart for public worship, and for other means of religious improvement; as also for a time of relaxation and rest from bodily labour, to those who are subject to it. This indulgence was extended under the law, to the animal creation, as well as to those persons who were in a state of servitude and bondage: "That thine ox and thine ass may rest; and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger may be refreshed."

The religious observance of one day in the week, is of so much importance to the preservation of piety and virtue; and the neglect of it is so evidently marked with irreligion, and, in general, with immorality, that, however necessary it is to avoid the superstitious observance of it, which our Saviour had occasion to censure, in the time of his personal appearance on earth; yet every reasonable consideration conspires to press the practice closely upon us, as affording an opportunity, which many could not otherwise easily obtain, of acquiring religious instruction and improvement; and of publicly performing that worship, which is due unto "Him that made heaven and earth, the seas, and the fountains of waters."

The pious Christian does not, however, confine his public de-

votions to one day in the week. Sensible of the obligation, and feeling the benefit of a more frequent performance of this religious service, he embraces opportunities, when afforded to him, of attending on public worship, on some other day, or days, than that which is especially set apart for this purpose : and, although this may in some instances, require him to leave his temporal concerns ; and may seem to be attended with some worldly disadvantages ; yet the views which he entertains of religious obligations, induce him to follow the example of the good king David, when, on a certain occasion, he made use of this disinterested language : “ Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God, of that which doth cost me nothing.”

CHAP. IX.

On Obedience and Patience.

After treating on the preceding particular duties, it may be proper to take notice of the general duty of Obedience ; and to connect with it that of Patience. By obedience is meant the practical and active part of those duties, which we know to be the Divine will concerning us.

When the mind is impressed with the belief of the power and goodness of God, and brought under the influence of that love and fear which we owe to him, obedience to the manifestations of his will, become the necessary result of this impression and influence. But, as the operations of these principles is generally slow and gradual, and the Christian traveller has many temptations and difficulties to encounter, before he has reason to believe that, “ in him verily is the love of God perfected ;” it is of importance to know, that simple obedience to the Divine will is an indispensable obligation : “ To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams : for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”

Fear and love are, however, motives which are essential to true obedience. We find them in the Holy Scriptures used to excite the minds of the people to the service of God, and to an attention to his commands : “ Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and serve him. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, and keep his charge, and his statutes, and his judgments, and his commandments alway. Ye shall observe to do as the Lord your God hath commanded you : ye shall not turn aside to the right-hand, or to the left ; that ye may live, and that it may be well with you. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel :—Obey my voice, and walk ye in all my ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.”

In the New Testament, the importance of obedience to the Di-

vine will and commands, is very strongly enforced. Our blessed Redeemer manifested how little he sought the praise of men, and how much he desired the glory of his Father, and the real good of mankind, when he gave this salutary caution to his hearers : "Not every one that saith unto me Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in Heaven." Again he saith : "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." And it was the observation of his beloved disciple, "he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever."

Besides the particular instructions given by the apostles of Christ, the general duty of obedience, or keeping the Divine commands, is thus enforced : "Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments : and his commandments are not grievous. Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar ; and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him, verily, is the love of God perfected." When we consider these various testimonies to the importance of the practical part of religion ; in which is necessarily involved a belief of its doctrines, because these are likewise Divine commands ; we shall see the propriety of that conclusion, to which Solomon, after all his researches was brought : "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

Intimately connected with obedience, is the duty of patience : by which is understood the bearing with fortitude of mind and resignation to the Divine will, whatever is permitted to befall us in this probationary state of existence. Obedience and patience, or to do and suffer the whole will of God, may be said to comprehend the whole of those duties which religion and virtue require. Patience therefore holds an important place among the duties of a Christian. His life is aptly compared to a state of warfare, in which he has not only much to do, but much to bear. He must, in common with other men, submit to many privations and trials ; and sometimes his religion will subject him to more ; for which, however, it affords an ample compensation. But as this compensation is not always immediate, we are called upon by our faith, our hope, and our love to the Supreme Being, without whose providential attention, we are told not a hair of our heads falleth to the ground, to bear with holy resignation, whatever he permits to befall us ; and, in conformity to those excellent examples which are transmitted to us in Holy Writ, to say, when sufferings and trials are our lot : "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be

the name of the Lord. Not my will but thine be done. The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

When our Lord was apprising his disciples of the afflictions which would befall them, he gave them this seasonable exhortation: "In your patience possess ye your souls;" and it seems that this exhortation was not in vain, for we afterwards find, when their Lord's predictions were verified, they had so attended to his instructions, as to be able to say: "We glory in tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us. For which cause we faint not; for though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day: for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal: but the things which are not seen, are eternal." The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, gives the following instructive exhortations on this subject: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they, verily, for a few days chastened us, for their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening, for the present, seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby."

The apostle James, among other exhortations to the duty of patience, gives the following: "Take my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and patience. Behold, we count them happy who endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord: that he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

As affliction is more or less the lot of humanity, it is of the utmost importance that we endeavour to have our minds fortified by patience, which may be called the strong hold of religion and virtue. To this end it may be beneficial to us to consider, how much we enjoy, or may enjoy, and of how little we are worthy. Humility is the ground-work of patience. It gives light to the mind, and strength to the heart. "But if thou faint (says Solomon) in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." The hum

ble, resigned mind knows that all things shall work together for good : and in times of affliction is enabled to say with the prophet .
 “ Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls ; yet I will rejoice in the Lord ; will joy in the God of my salvation.”

CHAP. X.

On Repentance towards God, and Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we consider the number and extent of our duties to God, on the one hand ; and the depravity and frailty of human nature, on the other ; we must suppose that the neglect or violation of these duties will, at times, take place, even with those who may make the most early and regular advances in the way of holiness ; but with respect to the generality of mankind, this neglect and violation are so prevalent, and self-evident, that any attempt to demonstrate them would be superfluous. If, therefore, it is, as it ought to be, a matter of concern to us, to live and die in the Divine favour, repentance, united with amendment of life, becomes a most important duty.

The very first sermons which were preached both by our Saviour, and his fore-runner, the Baptist, were on the subject of repentance ; and in a few energetic expressions they enforced this first principle of the doctrine of Christ : “ Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” With these precepts was laid, as it were, the foundation of that religion, with which the world has been blessed through Jesus Christ. Repentance was, no doubt, always a necessary duty, since the transgression of our first parents : but the gospel dispensation being more particularly applied to the depraved state of human nature, this first work of true religion is primarily inculcated. We also find, that when the disciples went forth to preach and to teach, this appears to have been the first and principal part of their mission : for we are told by one of the Evangelists, that “ they went out and preached that men should repent.” After the ascension of our Lord, and the pouring forth of the Spirit on the apostles and disciples, we find the doctrine of repentance was preached in this powerful language : “ Repent ye, and be converted ; that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord : and he shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you.”

In that excellent relation of his gospel labours, which the apostle Paul gave to the elders of Ephesus, we may perceive

that repentance formed a very prominent part in the doctrines which he taught: "testifying (says he) both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."

The connexion of repentance with faith in Christ, forms a peculiar excellence of the gospel dispensation, and to which it is of the utmost importance to attend. How consoling is this consideration! "if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." Numerous are the testimonies in holy writ to this gracious design of our merciful Redeemer. The evangelical prophet strongly and clearly speaks of it: "He was wounded for our transgressions; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes are we healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." This passage was opened to the Ethiopian Eunuch, and applied to Christ by Philip the Evangelist.

The doctrine of faith in Christ, as the means of reconciliation with God, is forcibly inculcated in the writings of the apostles. To repeat all that they say on this subject, would be to transcribe a large portion of their Epistles. We are told by our Saviour himself, when some inquired of him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God? This is the work of God, that ye believe on him, whom God hath sent." The importance of this belief, or faith, is thus inculcated by the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans: "Now the righteousness of God without the law, is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference; for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth, to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, largely exemplifies the doctrine of Christian redemption. The eighth, ninth, and tenth chapters are particularly forcible and interesting, in the manner in which this subject is treated; and it will be proper to recite, in this place, some of the pertinent exhortations and observations with which he closes the subject: "Having, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he has consecrated for us through the veil.—that is to say, his flesh: and having a High

Priest over the house of God ; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. He that despised Moses's law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses : of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who has trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of Grace ? For we know him, who hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me ; I will recompense, saith the Lord : and again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Seeing then, that our duty and interest are both intimately connected with our possessing faith in Christ ; let us embrace it with full purpose of heart, and, hold fast the profession of it without wavering. Yet let us not forget that "faith without works is dead, being alone ;" and that we ought therefore to "add to our faith, virtue : " and to hold it in conjunction with a good conscience : thus may we entertain a well-grounded hope, that, when this probationary state shall terminate, we shall "receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls."